

THE BLESSED HOPE - Bishop

He is saying there are others who have no hope. My son and I have discussed Dante's Inferno, about which I know practically nothing. But one statement mentions a Hell gate over which is a sign, "Abandon every hope you who enter." It's a sad situation, isn't it.

These folks at Thessalonica were wondering what happened to those whom they loved, who knew the Lord, and had died. And so Paul writes this - "I don't want you to be sorry like others who have no hope," verse 14: For if [or since] we believe that Jesus died and rose, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

Notice that preposition "with." When a believer dies, we have Scriptures to indicate that to depart is to be with Christ. The soul and spirit of a believer depart and are immediately with Christ, though the body is put in the grave. In another place Paul wrote, "Absent from the body, present with the Lord."

So Paul at this point is speaking about those who had died and are with the Lord in soul and spirit, and he is saying that when the Lord comes, verse 15: I say to you by the word of the Lord, that we that are left and remain unto the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For [or because] the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel and with a trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

What happens there is that they return, in verse 14, with the Lord. The soul and spirit return with the Lord, the body is raised from the grave, and they are reunited. So Paul is saying here that at the shout of the archangel the dead in Christ will rise first. The body comes out of the grave and is reunited with the soul and the spirit.

In the King James Version I need to mention that in the last part of verse 15 it says, "by no means prevent those who are asleep." That is misleading. It is not the word "prevent," it is the word "precede" or to go before.

He is saying that those who are in the grave will come out first - the last of verse 16. Then "we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them at a meeting of the Lord in the air. And so shall we always be with the Lord." The dead in Christ are raised; the living are caught up together with them to be with the Lord.

Therefore, verse 18, "comfort one another with these words." We don't sorrow as others who have no hope, but there is a hope concerning the future resurrection of believers and a reunion with living believers at the coming of the Lord.

Q. That seems to indicate that some people will not die. Is that correct?

THE BLESSED HOPE - Bishop

- A. That is correct - some will not die. We will look at another passage of Scripture which says the same thing. There are those who will be living when the Lord comes. They will be caught up immediately to be with the Lord without death.
- Q. Re the voice of an archangel. Is that a particular voice?
- A. Yes, I believe it is. We don't know who is doing that shouting, but it is "with the voice of an archangel and the trumpet of God." What we call the rapture of the Church will not be a secret thing. It will be a public event attended by shouts and the trumpet of God.

Q. Will it be heard by those who do not know Christ?

- A. I believe it will. I have no reason to believe otherwise. The call of course will be answered only by those who know the Lord. I personally think it will not be a secret event - secret in the sense of when it will take place, but not a secret when it does take place.

An archangel? There is only one named in Scripture. The angels have a sort of military structure. There are ordinary angels and there are angels over the angels, and the archangel would be the commander over the angelic realm.

Q. Re the dead risen from the grave.

- A. The body is raised from the grave. When the soul and the spirit depart to be with the Lord, I believe they are provided with an intermediate body. II Corinthians 5:1: "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed [that is our body], we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed, in this [that is this body at the present time] we groan, earnestly desiring to put on our dwelling place [or habitation] which is out of heaven, if indeed having been clothed we should not be found naked."

I believe Paul is saying here and in the following verses that God provides an intermediate body. When the Lord comes and the rapture takes place, the body that was put into the grave will be raised and restored to the believer. What all takes place there the Scripture does not say. Let us go to I Corinthians 15.

This is written perhaps four or five years after Paul wrote Thessalonians. He had been at Ephesus and the believers at Corinth had written to him concerning some things (I Cor. 7:1), and he answers their questions. One of the questions is in I Cor. 15:35: But some will say, "How are the dead raised, and with what kind of body do they come?"

THE BLESSED HOPE - Bishop

He answers that in the following verses. But go now to verse 51: Behold, I tell you a mystery [something that had not been revealed before]. We shall not all sleep [that is, die], but we shall all be changed [that is, believers], in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For a trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

That body that was put into the grave will be raised. For more about that read the following verses. In verse 44, "it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." It is put into the ground a natural body, and it is raised, motivated by the Spirit.

Q. Those that die at sea or are cremated - it doesn't exclude them?

A. No. All the Lord needs is just a little bit of the old body to reconstruct a new one - just a bit of dust. There is an organic connection between the body that is put into the ground and the one that will be raised. It is said that we get a new body every seven years. I've had twelve and am working on my thirteenth.

Comment: They don't work as well later.

A. We will all agree to that. But what bit of that twelve or thirteen will God be pleased to use to reconstruct the new body, I do not know. There is a story of Roger Williams, who was buried and they found that an apple tree had grown over the grave and thrust some roots into the body. Some agnostic was making fun of the fact that out of the body of Roger Williams that tree would have produced an apple and some boy would have plucked an apple and taken it to his teacher and the teacher would have eaten it. Which body does that belong

THE BLESSED HOPE

Taught by Willis E. Bishop
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Opening story: A Christian man remarked while packing his suitcase for a trip - in the presence of a friend he said, "I've still a little corner left and I'm saving it for a guidebook, a lamp, a mirror, some letters and a sword." "Ridiculous," exclaimed his friend, "you can't possibly get all those things in there." "Yes I can," replied the traveler. Then he deposited his Bible in the empty space.

Prayer: Our heavenly Father, we thank You for the fullness of the Word of God, that it meets our every need as we live this life for You. We pray that as we search it, even today, that there may be something worthwhile that will encourage us, that will lift us up, and that will glorify our Lord as we look for His coming. In the Savior's lovely name. Amen.

Our text for today (reading from the New King James Version) is Titus

THE BLESSED HOPE - Bishop

up in victory. O Death, where is your sting; O Hades, where is your victory. The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be firm, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not fruitless [without purpose] in the Lord.

The blessed hope! When the Lord comes, that will all come to fruition for the believer.

Q. That is what is called our glorified body?

A. That is our glorified body. To use two different terms, and I am not adamant about this, a believer who has a body changed immediately would have a glorified body, and believer who is raised from the grave would have a resurrected body. But it is the same body in quality because it will all be like the resurrected body of our Lord Jesus Christ. No wonder Paul calls that a blessed hope.

Some verses seem to indicate that the Lord's return might not be at any moment. Acts 23:11 - after Paul was taken prisoner in Jerusalem we read: The following night the Lord stood by Paul and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul. For as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness in Rome."

Acts 27:24 - Paul on board ship just before shipwreck: An angel of God, whom I serve and to whom I belong, stood by me saying, "Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand before Caesar."

In other words, there are some events to take place between the time the Lord spoke to Paul and the possibility of His coming. Would that not delay the blessed hope? As an illustration - I call my wife and say, "I'll be home at once, but I must stop at Publix." That means I'll not be home at once. Do these verses indicate that the coming of the Lord is not immediate?

The answer, as I see it: I Thessalonians 4 was written around 50 or 51 A.D. I Corinthians 15 was written about 55 or 56 A.D. Acts 23 in the preceding paragraph was an event around 49 or 51 A.D., and Acts 27 was an event around 60 or 61 A.D. Those verses in Acts 23 and 27 were written before Titus 2:13, for Titus was not written until 63 to 65 A.D.

Those verses seem to say the Lord can't come - Paul hadn't said that at that point. But now he is saying to Titus, "This is a blessed hope which we are looking for, which could happen at any moment."

A partial chronology of Paul's life:

II Timothy 4:20: "Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick." This could not have taken place during Paul's last visit to Jerusalem, for

THE BLESSED HOPE - Bishop

Trophimus was with Paul in Jerusalem. On the way to Jerusalem, Paul stopped at Miletus and called for the elders of the Church of Ephesus to come. But he went on from Miletus to Jerusalem, and when he got to Jerusalem Trophimus was still with him. So he couldn't have left him at Miletus.

This means that a release from prison is intended to be understood, because Paul did not stop at Miletus on his way back to Rome. He was a prisoner and did not stop at Miletus. So he must have stopped at Miletus some other time, and the other time it could have happened would have been after Paul was released from his first imprisonment in Rome. It was during that further travel that Paul left Trophimus at Miletus.

Titus 1:5: "I left you [Titus] in Crete." Paul never visited Crete during his travels in the book of Acts. Therefore, he must have visited Crete after his release from prison, and he left Titus there.

Titus 3:12 - some of the last words Paul wrote, as I see it: "When I send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, be hasty to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there." In other words, he is saying he will stop at Nicopolis. As far as I know, that is the last place, geographically, that is mentioned in the travels of Paul. It is believed that it was at Nicopolis that Paul was taken again as a Roman prisoner and then lost his life.

Conclusion: There is no Scripture event that must take place before the blessed hope event. In fact, Paul expected he might be among those living at the time of the rapture. See "we" in Titus 2:12.

I say to you that there is nothing that stands between you and me, as believers, and the possible return of the Lord in the rapture of dead and living believers to be with Him.

Q. Do you think there will be a lot of calamities when this happens?

A. I certainly do. I knew a bus driver in Washington, D.C. when I lived there - a Christian. He used to say, "I pray that the Lord will not come while I'm driving a bus." He was thinking about those who would be in the bus with him. This is another reason why it will not be a secret event. There will be lots of calamities. A lot of things will occur at that time which we cannot realize. But it is a wonderful hope for the believer.

There is no Tribulation rapture, no mid-Tribulation rapture, no pre-wrath rapture and no post-Tribulation rapture. In the future, perhaps soon, whether you are a pre- or post- or a-millennialist in your doctrine, there is a belief that there will be a Tribulation period. That Tribulation period begins with the signing of a covenant between the Antichrist and the nation of Israel for a seven-year period. And this blessed hope says that the rapture of the Church must take place before that Tribulation begins.

THE BLESSED HOPE - Bishop

Some believe the rapture will take place after the Tribulation begins. Some say it will take place in the middle of the Tribulation period. Some are now saying it will be a pre-wrath rapture, between the middle and the end of the Tribulation period. Some say it will be at the end of the Tribulation period.

But those views cannot be true, and I speak kindly of those who hold those views, because, if that were true, then something else would have to happen, such as the signing of that covenant. Paul and others say we are to look for the Lord at any moment. So I believe that a pre-Tribulation rapture is the biblical view of I Thessalonians 4 and I Corinthians 15.

That was the hope of the early Church. I will read a quote or two.

The First Epistle of Clement, written around 96 A.D. by a prominent leader of the church at Rome, who knew some of the apostles personally, and probably is the Clement referred to in Philippians 4:3:

Of a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness saying,
"Speedily He will come and will not tarry."

John Calvin, the reformer of Geneva during the fifteen hundreds and the founder of the Presbyterian Church, made the following statements in some of his commentaries on the Bible:

Be prepared to expect Him every day or, rather, at every moment. Today we must be alert to grasp the imminence of the return of Christ.

The Westminster Confession, written by the Puritans of England during the sixteen hundreds, declared that men should "shake off all carnal security and always be watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come."

It has been the hope of the Church ever since its beginning. I trust that it is your hope and mine today.

Scoffers will say, "Where is the promise of His coming?" But we believe the scoffers are wrong. So that everyone who has this hope of His coming will purify himself.

In I Corinthians 16:22, on "maranatha," it says, "If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed." And then there is the Greek word "anathema." There is a problem in reading the original language. When this was written there were no accent marks, and that word "maranatha" could be accented in one of two places. It could be pronounced "maran'atha," which would mean, "our Lord has come." Or if it is pronounced "marana'tha," it means, "O Lord, come." It depends upon which syllable is emphasized, and there is a difference of opinion as to where the accent should go.

THE BLESSED HOPE - Bishop

We have English words where the accent changes the meaning. One is "des'ert" and "desert'". "Des'ert" is a dry place, and "desert'" means to leave someone.

In chapter 10 of the Didache (written between 90 and 100 A.D.), we find that they expected the Lord to come at any moment, and the intent of "maranatha" was to be, "O Lord, come."

The first sentences in chapter 16 of the Didache say, "Watch for your life. Let your lamps not be quenched and your loins not be loosed. But be ye ready, for ye know not the hour in which our Lord cometh."

That was the Church's expectation around the year 100 A.D. It is still the hope of the Church today.

Here is a story that emphasizes this fact of expecting the Lord to come:

A tourist who visited an exquisite garden on a lovely estate in Italy spoke to the caretaker. "How long have you been here?" he asked. "Twenty-five years." "And how often has the owner been to see the estate?" "Four times." "When did he last come?" "Twelve years ago." "Who comes, then, to look after things?" "I am left pretty much alone." "Yet you keep the garden so spic and span that one would think you were expecting the owner tomorrow." The caretaker replied, "Today, sir, today!"

Just as the caretaker was expecting the return of his owner soon, you and I are looking for the "blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ." Perhaps today (Titus 2:13).

Prayer: Our heavenly Father, we do thank You for this precious, cleansing hope. We know that it is a certainty, based on the promises of the infallible Word of the living God. To this end, live through us today. May You be glorified. Thank You for the privilege of just meeting for these few moments. In the Savior's lovely name. Amen.